

READING

“We Don’t Control America” and Other Myths, Part 1

Miriam observes:

Last year I tutored at this nursing school. This woman was from Guatemala. I’m sure she’s educated, but she didn’t speak English. My job was to teach her enough English so she could pass the test to get in. One day she said, “Miriam, are you Jewish?” I said, “Yeah.” She said, “You know how I knew? Because you’re very smart and you dress modestly.” Then she said, “The Jews are the people of God— it says so in the Bible. That’s why they’re very smart and wealthy.”

I didn’t know what to say. If you’re Jewish, there is definitely an emphasis on being smart and succeeding in school. If people think that, then OK. But it’s a problem to think that all Jews are wealthy when they’re not. I was in Argentina last quarter. They have this huge economic crisis and a lot of extreme poverty. Synagogues are feeding lots and lots of hungry people who are Jews. No one can pay tuition anymore at the Jewish schools. Anti-Semitism is more of an issue there. A woman from Uruguay told a friend of mine that Jews run everything in Argentina.

People’s willingness to believe things like that is weird. That’s where I think stereotypes become a problem. It’s not OK to say, “All Jews are wealthier,” or “The Jews run things,” or “There’s something about the Jews.”¹

¹ “There’s Something About the Jews,” in Pearl Gaskins, *I Believe In...: Christian, Jewish, and Muslim Young People Speak About Their Faith* (Chicago: Cricket Books, 2004), 92.